

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area Fee Title Acquisition of Inholdings (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

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Background:

FWP proposes to purchase two private inholdings totaling approximately 276 acres of vital wildlife and fish habitat in Fish Creek and to block up FWP ownership and management of the Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The property fills in a crucial gap in public ownership that connects wildlife movement across a broader landscape and protects key habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The Fish Creek drainage is a Tier 1 Terrestrial Focal Area for wildlife connectivity and a high priority linkage zone for carnivores (grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, etc.) between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, Ninemile Divide and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. The subject parcels provide an important migratory corridor for elk and mule deer from the WMA to the higher elevation summer range in the Great Burn Proposed Wilderness, as well as 1.2 miles of Fish Creek, 120 acres of which is identified as a bull trout critical habitat priority area providing a key migratory corridor and rearing area. Acquiring these inholdings would eliminate the threat of development that would compromise the ecological integrity of the Fish Creek watershed while providing additional opportunity for public hunting and other recreation.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

FWP Region 2 would implement a public involvement process under Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and subsequently make a recommendation to the Commission, pending the outcomes of negotiations with the seller and appraisals.

Alternatives and Analysis:

No action is the only viable alternative to this proposal, which would leave these private inholdings available for future land uses that could create conflicts with the purposes of the WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends endorsement, allowing the Department to pursue and evaluate this opportunity for purchasing these private inholdings.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse the addition to the Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area, allowing the Department to conduct further analysis and associated public review.